

# PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

## TAMAR MASON

*Seeing Shadows*

22 November - 11 January 2025

Private View | Thursday 21 November 2024 | 6-8 pm



*Valley*, 2024, embroidery on fabric  
190 x 123 cm, 74 ¾ x 48 ½ in

Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is pleased to present *Seeing Shadows*, South African artist Tamar Mason's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

In new embroidered works, Mason explores the complexity of rural life in South Africa, intertwining human and environmental concerns. Focused primarily on the history and landscapes of Mpumalanga, Mason's home province, her works consider the impact of failing government services on local communities and the natural environment. They address enduring legacies of exploitation, championing the resilience, strength and diversity of those living in areas that are disproportionately affected by political corruption and ecological crisis. Memorialising tensions of past and present, Mason hand-stitches and beads narrative objects onto thick black fabric more commonly used in the production of men's suits, often placing loaded motifs against topographical arrangements. By working in a medium traditionally associated with women's work, ornament and domesticity, Mason crafts empowering and subversive narratives that raise awareness of patriarchal systems of governance.

In the exhibition title, *Seeing Shadows*, Mason references the legacy of South Africa's colonial and Apartheid history, envisioning the lasting traces of discrimination. In several works, she recreates the outline of her own shadow as it falls against the earth, rocks and grassland below her, considering the thousands of years of cultures and peoples that have lived there before. These silhouettes also create a dialogue with the Indigenous rock paintings of the San people, created up to 30,000 years ago. In *Valley* (2024), Mason's shadow is patterned with curling lichens, presented alongside indigenous plants in the Treur/Sefogwane Valley, an area known for its incredible yet fragile biodiversity. Mason's elongated silhouette, now raised from the floor to the vertical plane, looks downwards towards the viewer, asking us to question the potential negative impact of our actions, and shadows we might leave behind.

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Growing up on small holdings on the outskirts of Johannesburg and accompanying her archaeologist father on excavations in the veld, Mason has held a life-long interest in the history and landscapes of southern Africa. *Traces* (2024) is exemplary of this, depicting the impact of corporate greed on the land and its people. Mason focuses on Zama Zamas, illegal miners in South Africa, many of whom were fired from the shrinking formal mining sector. Without access to state resources, these skilled workers are forced to the fringes of society, mining for gold in disused mine shafts and rivers. In *Traces*, Mason illustrates objects left behind by Zama Zamas: coarse salt and tartaric acid used for cleaning gold, batteries for headlamps, and glycerine and potassium permanganate for exploding rock. These illegal mines damage the natural landscape and highlight the failure of southern African states to create safe, sustainable employment for their citizens. In her work, Mason isolates these systemic fissures, advocating for the marginalised, and celebrating rural experiences.

**Tamar Mason** (b. 1966 Johannesburg) lives and works in Mbombela, South Africa. She received a fine arts diploma from Scuola Lorenzo dei Medici, Florence (1987) and a BA from the University of South Africa (1993). From 1987 until 2002 she worked with rural women's community projects on a project-to-project basis, teaching embroidery and business skills, before moving to focus on her own practice. Major community commissions include the 35m long wall hanging for the Mpumalanga Legislature chamber, documenting the history and prehistory of the province; and the 11 large-scale panels for the Origins Centre, Wits University, which tell the story of the Bushmen or San in Southern Africa. Mason is Co-Director of The Artists' Press, a lithography studio printing and publishing hand printed limited edition prints by leading artists from southern Africa, including William Kentridge and Diane Victor.

In 2020 Tamar was featured in Pippy Houldsworth Gallery's Insights programme, a solo virtual project, and in 2022 was included in *Where cloudy waters collide...*, a group exhibition at the gallery. Other exhibitions include *An Odyssey in Print: Adventures in the Smithsonian Libraries*, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC; Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg; *Rijswijk Textile Biennial*, Museum Rijswijk, The Netherlands; Museum Africa, Johannesburg and Pretoria Art Gallery and Museum, Pretoria. Collections include The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.; The Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Elizabeth; Wits Art Museum, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; University of Wisconsin- Madison, Madison, WI; and Mpumalanga Legislature Collection, Mbombela.